

# **Characteristics of Female Offenders: Past and Present**

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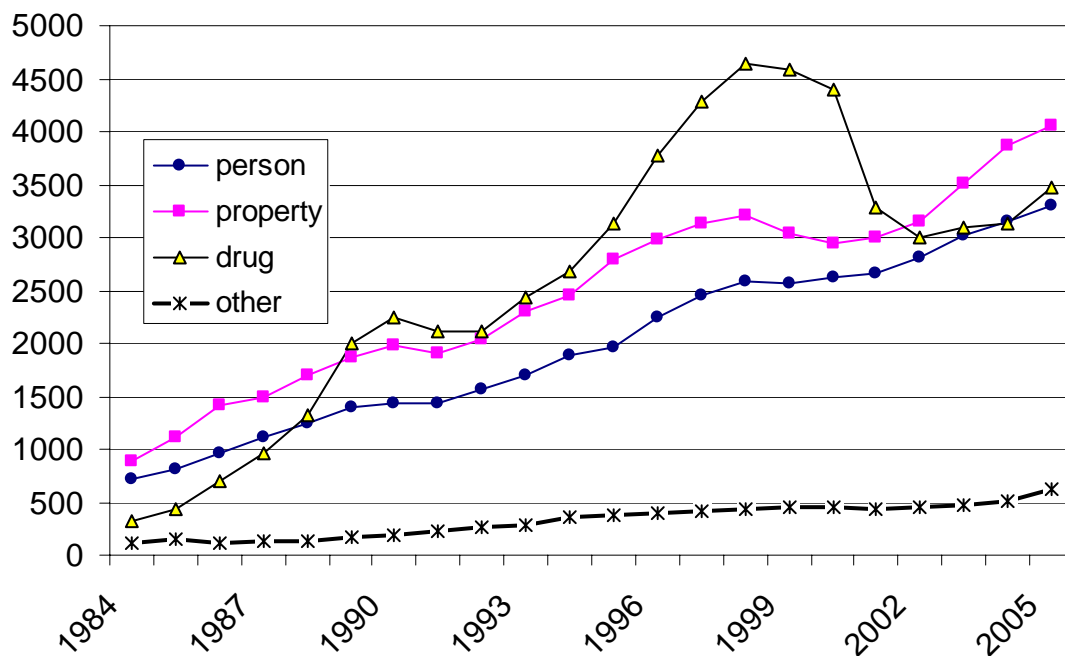
## CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE OFFENDERS: PAST AND PRESENT

This report presents data on the characteristics of female offenders from 1984 to 2005, concentrating on the 1997 to 2005 period. This report is descriptive. It does not present interpretations of why changes in the characteristics of female offenders are occurring.

### DO DRUG OFFENDERS CONTINUE TO COMPOSE A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE FEMALE POPULATION?

There was enormous growth in the female drug offender population in the late 1980s and continuing through the late 1990s, both in terms of raw numbers and as a percent of the total institutional population. By 1998, drug offenders were 42.7% of the female population. The number has dropped since then, but it is still about 30%, which is about twice as high as it was in 1984—the moment before the 1980s increase.

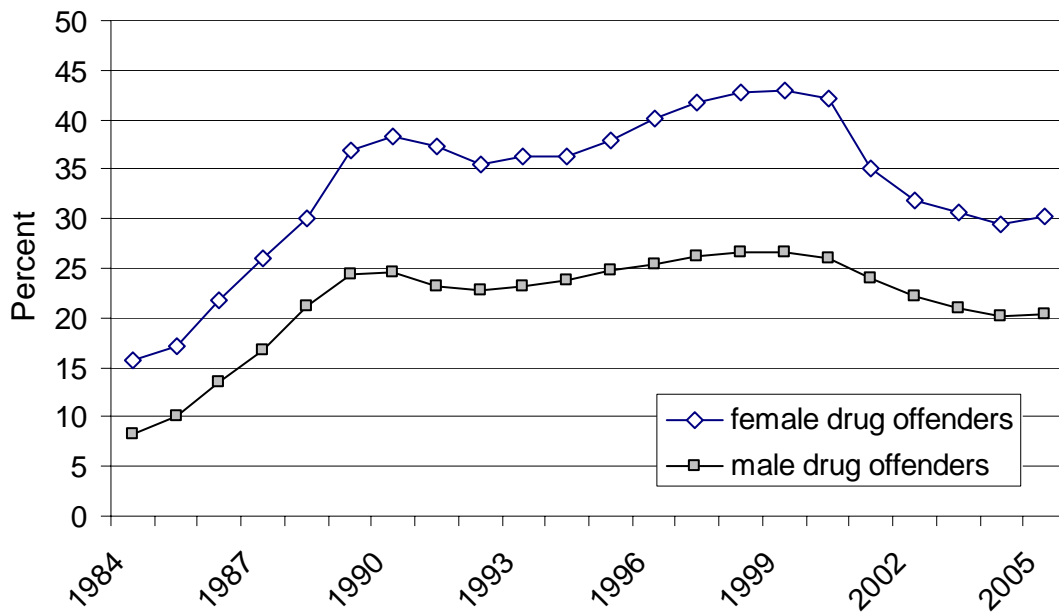
**Figure 1. Female Institution Population, 1984-2005**



California Prisoners and Parolees, 2004. CDC. The Data Analysis Unit provided the unpublished data from 2005.

The proportion of drug offenders stands out further if you contrast females with males. Female drug offenders consistently comprise a larger share of the female offender population than male drug offenders comprise of the male population. The average percentage of males incarcerated for drug crimes is 11 percentage points lower than the average for females during the 1984 to 2005 period. As of 2005, female drug offenders represented 30% of the female offender population and male drug offenders represented 20% of the male offender population.

**Figure 2. Drug Offenders Imprisoned by Gender, 1984-2005**



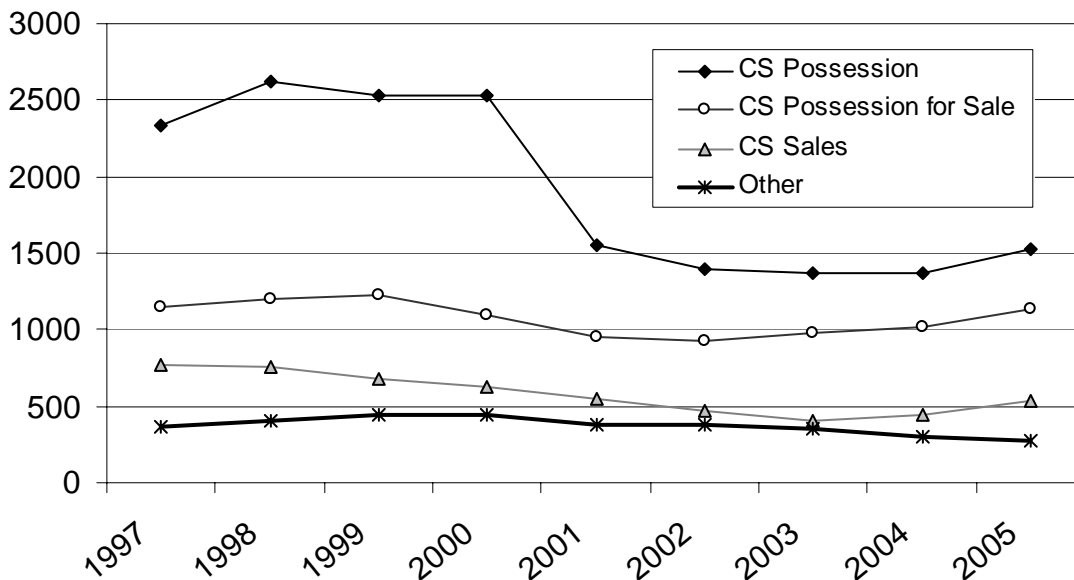
California Prisoners and Parolees, 2004. CDC. The Data Analysis Unit provided the unpublished data from 2005.

Drug offenders have been and remain more prevalent in the female population than in the male population.

#### WHY THE DECLINE IN FEMALE DRUG OFFENDERS?

The largest declines in the female drug offender population occurred with respect to controlled substance possession offenders. Declines in the other drug crimes have been more modest.

**Figure 3. Female Drug Offenders by Offense**



California Prisoners and Parolees, 2004. CDC. The Data Analysis Unit provided the unpublished data from 2005.

## IS THE FEMALE INMATE POPULATION BECOMING MORE VIOLENT?

Female offenders with prior or present commitment offenses meeting the statutory definition of “serious” (Penal Code 1192.7) or “violent” (Penal Code 667.5) have increased from 3,869 in 1997 to 4,600 in 2005. Relative to changes in the state population, however, this growth appears modest.

**Table 1. Serious and Violent Female Inmates, 1997-2005**

Year	No current or prior SV offense	Any SV	Percent SV in Female Inmate Population	Female SV Inmates per 100,000 population
1997	7,007	3,869	35.6	<b>23.8</b>
1998	7,453	4,031	35.1	<b>24.5</b>
1999	7,097	4,089	36.6	<b>24.5</b>
2000	6,861	4,120	37.5	<b>24.2</b>
2001	5,697	4,046	41.5	<b>23.3</b>
2002	5,674	4,120	42.1	<b>23.3</b>
2003	6,153	4,308	41.2	<b>23.9</b>
2004	6,486	4,491	40.9	<b>24.6</b>
2005	6,856	4,600	40.2	<b>24.9</b>
Average	6,587	4,186	39.0	24.1

Provided by the Data Analysis Unit, CDCR, 2006.

As of 2005, there are 6,856 female offenders that have neither a current nor a prior serious or violent offense.

## WHAT KINDS OF FEMALE OFFENDERS ARE ON PAROLE?

In recent years, serious and violent offenders have comprised about one-quarter of the female parole population. The percentage of the parole population with serious or violent commitment offenses has remained relatively constant with minor fluctuations. Relative to the growth of the California population as a whole, the proportion of serious and violent female parolees has decreased modestly.

**Table 2. Serious and Violent Female Parolees, 1997-2005**

	No Current or Prior SV Offense	Any SV	Percent SV in Female Parole Population	Female SV Paroles per 100,000 Population
1997	10,196	2,541	24.9	<b>15.7</b>
1998	10,901	2,710	24.9	<b>16.5</b>
1999	11,746	2,804	23.9	<b>16.8</b>
2000	12,273	2,919	23.8	<b>17.1</b>
2001	12,875	3,018	23.4	<b>17.4</b>
2002	12,168	2,896	23.8	<b>16.4</b>
2003	11,443	2,846	24.9	<b>15.8</b>
2004	11,441	2,736	23.9	<b>15.0</b>
2005	11,865	2,802	23.6	<b>15.1</b>
Average	11,656	2,808	24.1	16.2

Provided by the Data Analysis Unit, CDCR, 2006.

# WHAT KINDS OF FEMALE OFFENDERS POSE THE GREATEST RISK TO REOFFEND?

The release cohorts from 2000 to 2003 show the highest rates of recidivism for the following types of female offenders.

**Table 3. One-year Recidivism Rates for Female Parolees, 2000-2003 Cohorts**

	Principle Commitment Offense	Number Paroled	Returned Within One Year
<b>2000</b>	Escape	21	61.90%
	Vehicle Theft	117	47.86%
	Receiving Stolen Property	118	45.76%
	CS Possession	1944	40.28%
	Robbery	180	39.44%
	<i>2000 Total</i>	<i>6295</i>	<i>33.50%</i>
<b>2001</b>	Receiving Stolen Property	153	45.75%
	Vehicle Theft	138	39.86%
	Possession Weapon	49	38.78%
	Other Offenses	154	35.71%
	CS Possession	1819	35.62%
	<i>2001 Total</i>	<i>6049</i>	<i>30.70%</i>
<b>2002</b>	Possession Weapon	45	48.89%
	Receiving Stolen Property	186	43.01%
	Vehicle Theft	165	40.61%
	Other Sex Crimes	20	40.00%
	CS Possession	1046	35.28%
	<i>2002 Total</i>	<i>5356</i>	<i>29.14%</i>
<b>2003</b>	Vehicle Theft	211	41.71%
	CS Possession	960	34.48%
	Receiving Stolen Property	253	33.99%
	Arson	24	33.33%
	Burglary Second	455	32.53%
	<i>2003 Total</i>	<i>5641</i>	<i>26.91%</i>

Recidivism Rate, 2003-2005 CDC. 2003 data is not yet published.  
(Top five rankings in terms of recidivism rates).

Controlled substance possession (CS Possession) has been the largest single category of offenders among first releases to parole and they are routinely among the most likely to recidivate.

Research on evidence-based practices shows that treatments and interventions focused on those that are most likely to recidivate produce the largest gains. The literature refers to this as the “risk principle” (Bogue et al., 2004). Data on recidivism for California shows that selected property and drug offenders are consistently the most likely to return to the prison system. As a result, focusing on these kinds of offenders will have largest potential to reduce recidivism.

## Definitions and Formulas

### **Figure 1: Female Institution Population, 1984-2005**

**Population:** Females within adult institutions sent to prison for a felony offense. Excluded offenders include civil narcotic addicts, inmates held from other states or the federal system, and county diagnostic cases.

**Time Period:** Assessed on December 31<sup>st</sup> for each year.

**Person Crimes:** Murder 1<sup>st</sup>, murder 2<sup>nd</sup>, manslaughter, vehicular manslaughter, robbery, assault deadly weapon, other assault, rape, lewd act with child, oral copulation, sodomy, penetration with object, other sex offenses, and kidnapping.

**Property Crimes:** Burglary 1<sup>st</sup>, burglary 2<sup>nd</sup>, grand theft, petty theft w/prior, receiving stolen property, vehicle theft, forgery/fraud, and other property offenses.

**Drug Crimes:** Includes felony drug crimes in the following CDCR categories: controlled substance possession, controlled substance possession for sale, controlled substance sales, controlled substance manufacturing, controlled substance other, hashish possession, marijuana possession for sale, marijuana sale, and marijuana other.

**Other Crimes:** escape, driving under influence, arson, possession of weapon, other offenses.

### **Figure 2: Drug Offenders Imprisoned by Gender, 1984-2005**

**Population:** Males and females within adult institutions sent to prison for a felony offense. Excluded offenders include civil narcotic addicts, inmates held from other states or the federal system, and county diagnostic cases.

**Time Period:** Assessed on December 31<sup>st</sup> for each year.

**Drug Offenders:** Includes felony drug crimes in the following CDCR categories: controlled substance possession, controlled substance possession for sale, controlled substance sales, controlled substance manufacturing, controlled substance other, hashish possession, marijuana possession for sale, marijuana sale, and marijuana other.

### **Figure 3: Female Drug Offenders by Offense**

**Population:** Females within adult institutions sent to prison for a felony offense. Excluded offenders include civil narcotic addicts, inmates held from other states or the federal system, and county diagnostic cases.

**Time Period:** Assessed on December 31<sup>st</sup> for each year.

**Drug Offenses:** The CDCR aggregates the large number of legal codes into nine offenses. For this analysis, drug offenses were further condensed into:

- 1.) Controlled substance possession.
- 2.) Controlled substance possession for sale.

- 3.) Controlled substance sales.
- 4.) Other (controlled substance manufacturing, controlled substance other, hashish possession, marijuana possession for sale, marijuana sale, and marijuana other).

### **Table 1 and Table 2: Serious and Violent Female Inmates and Parolees**

**Population:** Female felons within CDCR institutions (Table 1) and the parole system (Table 2).

**Time Period:** Institution and parole populations assessed on December 31<sup>st</sup> for each year.

**No-Current or Prior Serious/Violent Offense:** Inmates in the institution or parole system that are not being held for a serious offense and who have never been in the California prison system for a serious offense.

**Any SV:** Individuals with a current or prior serious/violent offense in their CDCR prison history.

**Violent Offense:** The California Penal code 667.5 uses twenty-two statements to define some felonies as "violent." Examples of such felonies include murder, mayhem, robbery, rape, other sex offenses, kidnapping, carjacking, and extortion.

**Serious Offense:** The California Penal code 1192.7 defines some felonies as serious. Serious felonies include all of the offenses defined as violent, but also include other felonies such as burglary of a residence, assault with intent to commit robbery, and selling drugs to minors.

### **Table 3: One-year Recidivism Rates for Female Parolees**

**Recidivist:** A felon who returns to prison for any reason during a specified follow-up period.

**Return to Prison:** Includes felons who are returned to Substance-Abuse Treatment-Control Units in correctional facilities; returned pending a revocation hearing by the Board of Prison Terms on charges of violating the conditions of parole; returned to custody for parole violations to serve revocation time; or returned to prison by a court for a new felony conviction.

**Release Period:** A calendar year.

**First Release to Parole (number paroled):** The first release to parole for felon with new admissions and parole violators returned with a new term (PV-WNT).

**Principle Commitment Offense:** The controlling offense designated by the court as the base term, usually the offense that keeps the offender in custody the longest period of time. The principle commitment offense is used for statistical purposes by the CDCR.



**Returned Within One Year:** The proportion (percentage) of individuals from the parole cohort who returned to prison after one year of being released.

$$\text{Recidivism Rate}_{(\text{observation period})} = \frac{\# \text{ of individuals returned to prison within one year}}{\# \text{ of felons paroled from commitment category for that year}}$$

Example: Offenders released in 2000 with a CS Possession commitment offense

$$\text{Recidivism Rate (during year 2000)} = \frac{783}{1944} \times 100 = 40.28\%$$

## **References**

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